

JENNIE BAXTER: JOURNALIST

By ROBERT BARR.

V.—THE PRIME MINISTER'S INDISCRETION.

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As Jennie rapidly hurried away from the office of Mr. Cadbury Taylor there arose in her mind some agitation as to what the detective would think of her sudden flight. She was convinced that, up to the moment of leaving him so abruptly, he had not the slightest suspicion that she herself, to whom he had been talking, was the person he had been searching for up and down Europe. What she thought of him, however, while speaking with him, was not a word of leave taking, but a word of farewell, as if the earth had opened and swallowed her, and all because the handle of the door to the inner room had turned? Then the excuse she had given for not wishing to meet Lord Donald must have struck him as ridiculously inadequate. When she reached her desk and reflected upon the more calmness over the situation, she found no cause to excuse herself for her hasty departure. Although she had acted on sudden impulse, she saw there had been nothing else to do. Another moment and she would have been face to face with Lord Donald himself.

Next day brought a note from the detective which somewhat reassured her. He apologized for having made the appointment without her permission and explained that Lord Donald's unexpected arrival in London and his stubborn belief that it had been the princess herself whom he met at the ball seemingly left the detective no alternative but to call on the person who had so persistently advanced the theory, to explain it to the one most intimately concerned. It had not occurred to him at the time to think that Miss Baxter might object to meet Lord Donald, who was an entire stranger to her, but now he saw where he was wrong, etc. This note did much to convince Jennie that, after all, the detective had not seen the clues which appeared to be spread so plainly before his eyes. Cadbury Taylor, however, said nothing about the search being ended, and a few days later Jennie received a disquieting letter from the Princess von Stieghelm.

"My dear Jennie," her Highness wrote, "I am sure the detectives are after you, and so I thought it best to send you a word of warning. Of course it is only surmise on my part, but for days there has been a woman hovering about the castle trying to get information from my servants. My maid came directly to me and told me she knew. The woman detective had spoken to her. This inquisitive person, who had come from Paris, wished particularly to know whether I had been seen about the castle during the week in which the Duchess of Chislehurst's ball took place, and so this leads me to suppose that some one is making inquiries for you. I am doing no harm, but I am sure that either the Duke or the Duchess of Chislehurst, but I rather think it is the former. I have written an indignant letter to Lord Donald, accusing him of having caused detectives to hunt the castle. I have not yet received a reply, but Lord Donald is a truthful person, and in a day or two I expect to find out whether or not he has a hand in this business. I am sure that, on your guard, and I will write you again as soon as I have something further to tell."

The reading of this letter greatly increased Jennie's fears, for she felt assured that, stupid as the men undoubtedly were, they were almost certain to stumble upon the truth if the investigation was continued. She wrote a hurried note to the princess, imploring her to be cautious and not inadvertently give any clue that would lead to her discovery. Her letter evidently crossed one from the princess herself. Lord Donald had confessed, said the letter, and promised never, never to do it again. "He says that before my letter was received he had stopped the detectives, who were doing no harm, and apparently only annoying innocent people. He says the search is ended, and that as the detective is concerned, and that I need fear no more intrusions from inquiry agents, male or female. He apologized very handsomely, but says he has not given up hopes of finding the lady who disappeared. And now, Jennie, I hope that you will admit my cleverness. You see that I only had a word or two from my maid as to what she had seen, and at once discovered who was the instigator of it. So I think I wouldn't make a bad detective myself. I am tremendously interested in episodes like this. I believe if I had known nothing of the impersonation and if the case had been put in my hands I should have discovered you long ago. Can't you think of some way in which my undoubted talent for research may be made use of? You don't know how much I envy you in your position. I wish you would let me help you next time you have something important to do. Will you promise?"

"When you write again please send your letter to Vienna, as we are going into residence there, my husband having been suddenly called to the capital. He holds an important position in the government, as perhaps you remember."

Jennie was delighted to know that all inquiry had ceased, and she wrote a long letter of gratitude to the princess. She concluded her epistle by saying: "It is perfectly absurd of you to envy one who has to work as hard as I. You are the person to be envied. It is not all beer and skinkins in your position, which is a good thing, for I don't like beer, and I don't know what skinkins is—or are. But I promise you that the next time I have an interesting case on hand I shall write and give you full particulars, and I am sure that together we shall be invincible."

But one trouble leaves merely to give place to another in this life. Jennie was disturbed by the fact that the princess was becoming more and more confidential with her. He sat down by her desk whenever there was a reasonable excuse for doing so, and he consulted her on matters important and on matters trivial. An advance of salary came to her, and she knew it was through his influence with the board of directors. Although Mr. Hardwick was satisfied with the business matters, she had a feeling of uneasiness, and he often came and sat by the girl's desk, evidently wishing to say something and yet quite as evidently having nothing to say, and thus the situation became embarrassing. Jennie was a practical girl and had no desire to complicate her situation by allowing her employer to fall in love with her, yet it was impossible to go to him and ask that his attentions might be limited strictly to a business basis. The crisis, however, was brought on by Mr. Hardwick himself. One day when they were alone together he said abruptly:

"That romance in high life which you were investigating with Mr. Cadbury Taylor did not come to anything?"

"No, Mr. Hardwick."

"Then don't you think we might enact a romance in high life in this very room? It is high enough from the street to entitle it to be called a romance in high life." And the editor grinned uneasily, like an unready man who hopes to relieve a dilemma by a poor joke.

Jennie, however, did not laugh and did not look up at him, but continued to scribble shorthand notes on the paper before her.

"I see you have discovered my secret, although I hoped to conceal it even from your alert eyes. I am, indeed, in the situation of Ralph Rackstraw in 'Pinafore'—I love, and love, alas, about my station—and now that you know half you may as well know all. It arose out of that unfortunate ball given by the Duchess of Chislehurst, which will haunt me all the rest of my life, I fear," said Jennie, still without looking up.

Mr. Hardwick smothered an ejaculation and was glad that the girl's eyes were not upon him. There was a pause of a few moments' duration between them. He took the path that was left open to him, fondly flattering himself that while he had stumbled inadvertently upon her romance he had kept his own secret safe.

"I—I have no right to intrude on your confidences, Miss Baxter," he said finally with an effort, "and I hope you will excuse me."

"Oh, I have been sure for some days that you knew it," interrupted the girl, looking up, but not at him. "I have been neglecting my work, I fear, and so you were quite right in speaking."

"No; your work is all right. It wasn't that exactly—but never mind. We won't speak of this any more, for I see it embarrasses you."

The man saw the color come and go in her cheeks and thought he had never beheld any one so entrancing. He rose quickly without making further attempt at explanation and left the room. One or two tears were stained on the paper on which the girl was scribbling. She did not like giving pain to any one, but could not help herself. The man who had made her so happy, because I am like those dreadful persons in the sensational plays who hold the guilty deed in their hands and blackmail them. But you are a nice girl and I won't say anything you don't want to hear. I am sure that if you wish to find out about this political crisis."

"I want to discover why the premier did not follow up his speech with another. He must have known when he spoke how his words would be taken in England. There, at least, he was not deceived. He knew that the unforseen circumstances intervening have nullified. I want to know what those unforseen circumstances were, and how they have nullified. I want to know what those unforseen circumstances were, and how they have nullified. I want to know what those unforseen circumstances were, and how they have nullified."

"I am willing to try," said Miss Baxter, as there flashed across her mind an idea that here was a case in which Princess von Stieghelm could be of the greatest assistance to her.

"It is a matter of thought," went on the editor, "that the Emperor is extremely averse to having trouble with England or any other country. Still, if that were the case, a new Cabinet would undoubtedly have been formed after this intermediate address of the premier; but this man still holds his office, and there has been neither explanation nor apology from him, or Cabinet, as to the matter, that there is something behind all this, a wheel within a wheel of some sort, because the day after the speech there came a rumor from Vienna that an attempt had been made on the life of the Emperor or of the premier. It was exceedingly vague, but it was alleged that a dynamite explosion had taken place in the palace. This was promptly contradicted. We all knew where the explosion took place, and it was internal trouble of some kind in the court at Vienna, and if we could publish the full details such an article would give us a European reputation. When could you be ready to begin your journey, Miss Baxter?"

"I am ready now."

"Well, in an affair like this it is best to lose no time. You can leave to-morrow morning, certainly; but I must leave the office at once, and you must get some one to finish the work I am on."

"I will attend to it," said the editor. Thus related Jennie betook herself to a telegraph office. She knew that if she wrote a letter to the princess, who was now in Vienna, she would probably herself reach that city as soon as her note, so she telegraphed that something important was on hand which would take her to Vienna by next day's Orient express and intimated that it was a matter in which she might need the assistance of the princess. Then she hastened to her rooms to pack up. That evening there came an answering telegram from Vienna. The princess asked her to bring her train as near as she could to the railway station and all the rest of her. The lady added that she herself would be at the railway station and asked Jennie to telegraph to her en route. It was evident that her highness was quite prepared to engage in whatever scheme there was on hand, and this fact encouraged Jennie to hope that perhaps success awaited her.

True to her promise, the Princess von Stieghelm was waiting at the immense railway station at Vienna, and she received her friend with kushing and a carriage, and she was as glad as when she entered it, for many women have the faculty of taking long journeys without protracted railway traveling seems to have upon the masculine, and probably more careless, portion.

"Oh, you dear girl," cried the princess, "you cannot tell me how glad I am to see you. I am just waiting for some one to tell me."

"Ab, Mr. Hardwick," she said, with a sigh.

English. I am so tired of French and German, although I am not saying that I speak those two languages well; yet English is my own tongue, and it is so delightful to talk in my own language. I shall stay every blessed word you say, which you can easily see those who pretend to speak English allow you to be just what you are. I have written with my own hand invitations to about two dozen people to our tea on Thursday, and about the wife of the premier, Countess Stren, I expect you to devote yourself to that lady and tell me Vienna. Don't let me hear of your going to Europe. Have you been talking consolation to Gretchen? I came up here half an hour ago, and I heard the sound of crying in this room."

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